THE BRITISH EMPIRE
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No. 73
THE IMPERIAL FACADE
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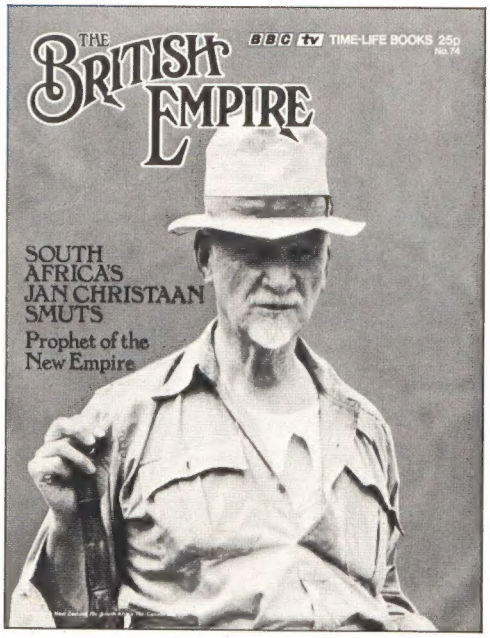
Cover: This jigsaw, which belongs to the Queen's private collection, shows her grandfather, King George V, as dignified symbolic head of the British Empire and Commonwealth.



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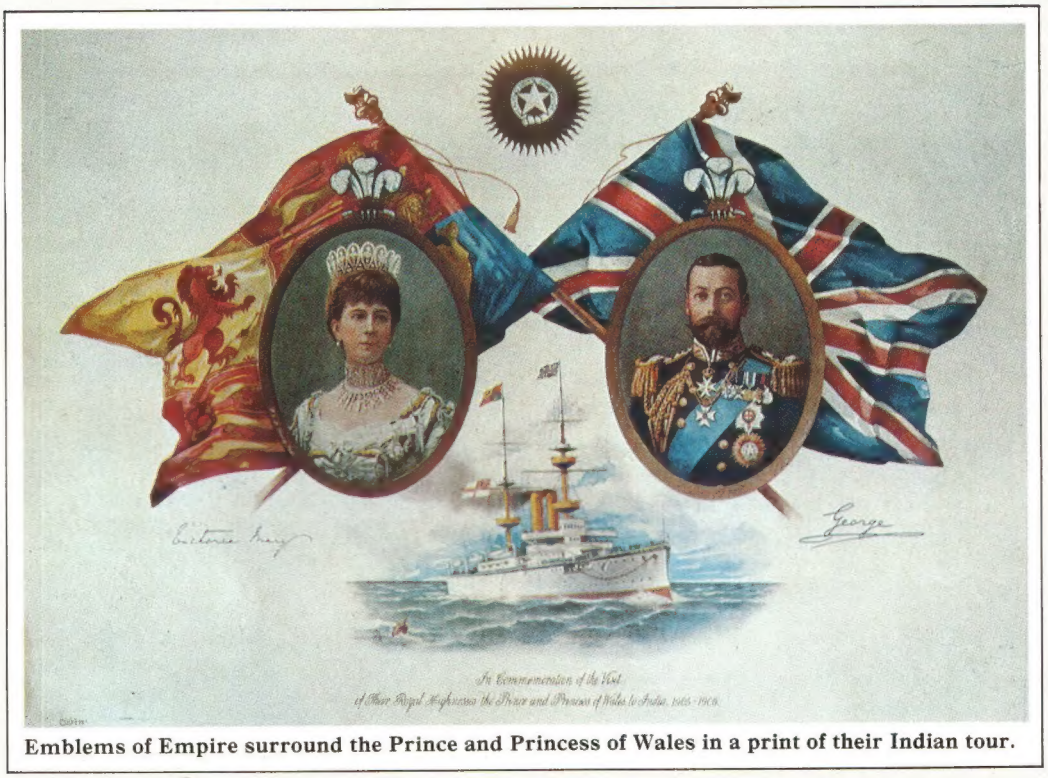
THE IMPERIAL FACADE



Emblems of Empire surround the Prince and Princess of Wales in a print of their Indian tour.

The end of the First World War left Britain with an Empire greater in size, population and apparent unity than ever before. The marvels of science seemed to promise an even closer relationship. Wireless brought the voice of the King-Emperor to millions of his subjects and air travel was soon to "annihilate" the distance between London and the dominions. But imperial sentiment was dying, stricken by rising nationalism in subject nations and economic decline at home: while the Empire show went on, the audience was dwindling fast

by Denis Judd

When the guns fell silent at the end of the Great War and much of the world lay numbed and shell-shocked by the greatest human upheaval in history, the British Empire remained apparently as firm and immutable as before. In 1919 it actually reached its greatest extent. Three vanquished Empires – the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the German overseas Empire and the Ottoman Empire – were tactfully dismembered by the peace treaties and many of the fragments went to the victorious Allies, including Britain.

Although the old Habsburg dominions were split up according to a fitfully applied formula of national self-determination, and many former subjects won independence, this most European procedure was not thought suitable for non-Europeans. Instead, the German and most Turkish colonial possessions were appropriated by the victors as mandates under the League of Nations, a way of making annexation seem respectable.

New splodges of British red appeared on the map: Palestine, Iraq, Tanganyika, and strips of the Cameroons and Togoland. Even Australia, New Zealand and South Africa got their lion cubs' share. To the "dominion over palm and pine" described by Kipling in his poem, *Recessional*, was now added (profitably) dominion over the oil-wells of Iraq and (most unprofitably) a shaky dominion over the Jewish homeland.

In this way the Empire acquired some 13 million new subjects and nearly a million square miles of fresh territory. It sprawled across the globe, diverse and impressive: some regions stagnant, others vitally productive; its peoples comprising backward savages and sophisticated urban-dwellers; their attitudes varying from dull obedience or ardent patriotism to virulent anti-imperialism.

There was, apparently, still a good head of steam in the imperial engine. Leading figures from the heyday of imperialism, such as Curzon, Milner, Kipling and Baden-Powell, still held the stage, some of them surviving throughout the inter-war period. Young men still prepared for a lifetime's service in India or the colonies, just as their fathers had done. The bond with the dominions had taken on a new, tangible reality in the Great War, and memories of Anzacs and Canadians fighting at Gallipoli and Vimy Ridge were still fresh in the public mind.

Cultural and economic links counted for a great deal, and a comfortable if hazy sense of belonging to a world-wide family could still readily be whipped up by the familiar symbols – a maple leaf, a kiwi, a few bars of *Waltzing Matilda* – or reinforced by the charismatic enthusiasm of Field-Marshal Smuts. And when the most important industrial combine of the decade was formed in 1926, it seemed entirely right and proper that it should be christened Imperial Chemical Industries. Very few people supposed that within little more than a generation the imperial sun would have set.

But compared, say, with the frenzy of *fin de siècle* imperialism, when the Dervishes went down before the Maxim guns at Omdurman, or Field-Marshal Roberts carried the flag to Pretoria, the glamour of the imperial idea was definitely fading in the 1920s. Nevertheless, it did not fade evenly right across the social spectrum and for some parts of the Establishment and popular opinion, it still shone brightly. In their efforts to halt imperial disintegration and preserve Empire sentiment, the latter-day imperialists hailed every advance in communications as a new link to bind the Empire together and exploited to the full every existing imperial asset.

The greatest imperial asset was the monarch. The King was still Rex Imperator. He embodied even now the grandiose image created in 1877 when Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. And in George V, Britain had a king who entered into the role of imperial parent-figure much more naturally and convincingly than his grandmother, Queen Victoria herself. According to the account which appeared in *The Times*, his dying words were "How is the Empire?" (though it has been suggested that what he actually asked was: "Who is on at the Empire?") Both he and Queen Mary were genuinely popular embodiments of continuity and stability in a world of change.

In 1880, when he was 15, George V had sailed round the Empire with his elder brother, Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence, in H.M.S. *Bacchante*. But at that time he had no notion that he would ever rule it. He was to have been a professional sailor. Only the death of Albert Victor, the heir apparent, in 1892, brought him to the threshold of kingship. Then, as Prince of Wales designate, he was brought into the affairs of Empire when his father, Edward VII, sent him to open the first Federal Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901.

King Edward himself was not an enthusiastic advocate of this royal foray to the Antipodes, and had indeed argued that "he had only one son left out of three and he will not have his life unnecessarily endangered for any political purpose." (The king's youngest son, Alexander John, who was born in 1871, but survived for only a few hours.)

But these objections were coolly and persuasively countered by Arthur Balfour, the leader of the Commons, who saw the value of promoting the Crown as a link of Empire, and who put his views in sentences which still had great power in the inter-war period: "The King is no longer merely King of Great Britain and Ireland and of a few dependencies. . . . He is now the greatest constitutional bond uniting together in a single Empire com-

Edward VII (above), surrounded by animals symbolizing the countries of the Empire, adorns an Empire Day postcard. Introduced in 1903 to rouse imperial sentiment, the occasion provided a bright spot in the lives of schoolchildren (right), but for many of their parents it was a meaningless ritual.

munities of free men separated by half the circumference of the Globe. All the patriotic sentiment which makes such an Empire possible centres chiefly in him; and everything which emphasizes his personality to our kinsmen across the seas must be a gain to the monarchy and the Empire."

During his lifetime George V visited all the major territories of the British Empire, from loyalist New Zealand to troubled southern Ireland, from the West Indies to Singapore. In the process he showed himself as the embodiment of imperial unity to suspicious Cape Dutch, disaffected Bengalis and unresponsive French Canadians, as well as to the more stalwart patriots of Durban, Belfast, Brisbane and Toronto.

Not only did King George continue to exhibit a consistent and serious concern for the Empire unrivalled by any predecessor save George III, but he imbued his sons with it, too. With the exception of Prince John, who suffered from epilepsy and died at the age of 14, he sent them all on Empire tours at different times. As Prince of Wales, the future Edward VIII helped by his widely publicized Empire travels to make the Crown seem a living rather than a formal link.

Although Edward VIII's abdication in 1936 and the scandal over Mrs. Simpson tarnished the royal image, there was a determined effort to restore confidence at the coronation of George VI the following year. Canadian troops mounted guard at Buckingham Palace; visiting chiefs and rajahs were written up as colourfully as possible in the Press; department stores vied with one another in putting on patriotic displays. For the last time, the citizens of London were treated to a full-scale imperial extravaganza.

Of course, it was arguable that the whole paraphernalia of royal tours, augmented by the much rarer beanos of coronations and jubilees, merely appealed to the converted and left the cynics and sceptics unmoved. There is no doubt that George V took a naïve view of royal tours, claiming, for instance, in 1910, that if news of the proposed Coronation Durbar due to be held in Delhi could "be made known some time before, it would tend to allay the unrest . . . which unfortunately exists in some parts of India."

Looked at dispassionately, the Delhi Durbar and royal tour of 1911 had as much success in curbing the growth of Indian nationalism as King Canute's peremptory instructions to the waves so many centuries before.

Even the brisker, less pretentious tours of the future King Edward VIII were not without their problems. Rapturously though the dashing Prince of Wales was received, he was also closely pursued by journalists anxious for copy of an unusual, even scandalous nature.

There was a good deal of journalistic tittle-tattle that the Prince of Wales shirked his duty at some dances and receptions by avoiding the wives of officials and seeking out females from the younger set. His royal papa brooded over these alleged unorthodoxies, unable to accept them as legitimate behaviour ✍

ROYAL TOURIST

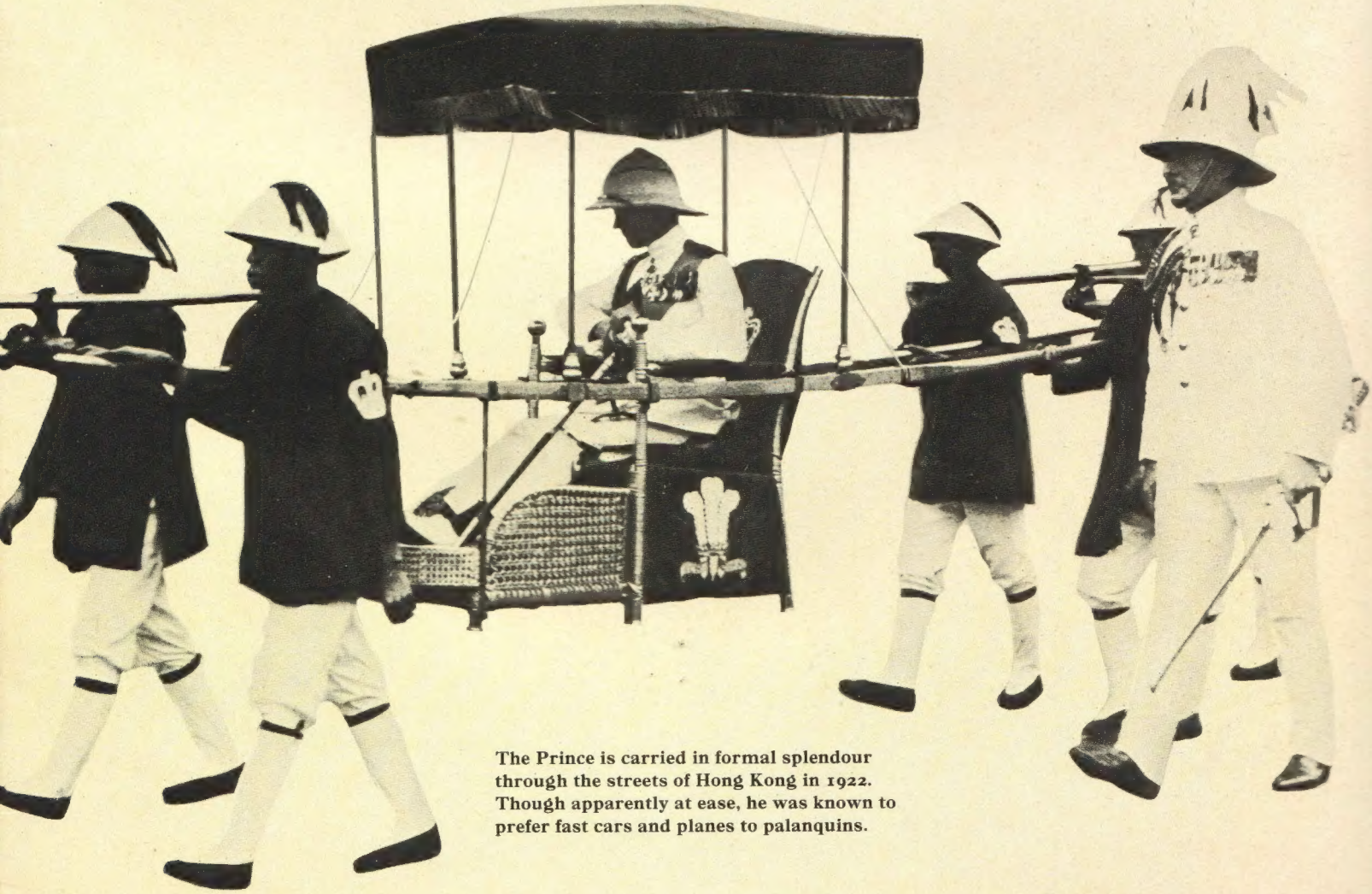
The Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VIII, played a widely applauded role on the stage of Empire between the wars. His boyish good looks, charm and vivacity delighted onlookers from Ottawa to Melbourne and from Fiji to Bermuda. Setting little store by stuffy ceremonial, he managed, during his tours, to achieve a relaxed rapport with his father's subjects. This occasionally led him into unconventional episodes, as when he mounted a bucking bronco in Saskatoon. The King disapproved, but it set the seal on his popularity.

The Prince of Wales is decked out in Indian head-dress as "Big Chief Morning Star" during his tour of Canada in 1919. Such informality delighted the Prince as well as his hosts and made the Crown link a reality.

Dressed in a lounge suit and smiling broadly, the Prince jostles his way through a crowd of well-wishers as he makes for his train at Brentford, Canada, in 1919.

Spruce in military uniform, the young Prince of Wales receives the loyal salute from a bearded veteran of the Indian Army while visiting India in 1922.

Borneo warriors with spears and shields line the royal route in greeting as the Prince of Wales sweeps past on royal tour in 1922. The Prince's three-feather crest adorns his car.



The Prince is carried in formal splendour through the streets of Hong Kong in 1922. Though apparently at ease, he was known to prefer fast cars and planes to palanquins.

The Prince of Wales (centre) sits with the crew of H.M.S. *Renown* in June, 1922, on the way home from his royal tour. This had lasted for eight months and had included India, Colombo, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan. The Prince arrived back in England on June 20 in time to celebrate his 28th birthday three days later.

II. The Machinery of Empire

More predictable than royal tours, and considerably less expensive, were the Imperial Conferences of the inter-war years. Here was a vehicle fashioned for improving Empire co-operation. Conferences were called in 1921, 1923, 1926, 1929, 1930, 1932 and 1937 – though those of 1929 and 1932 dealt only with specific constitutional and economic problems.

The dominions and India sent delegates to these early gatherings of the "Commonwealth Club." Discussion ranged over issues as diverse as the definition of Dominion status, the introduction of Imperial Preference and the defence of the Empire.

Valuable though the conferences were as forums for the friendly exchange of views, they lacked the smallest particle of executive or legislative power. The dominions wanted a properly recognized independence and had no wish to subordinate their flourishing nationhood to restrictive schemes for imperial reorganization. Indeed, out of the vital conferences of 1926 and 1930 emerged the Statute of Westminster of 1931 – which cut the dominions free of the remaining constitutional bonds subordinating them to the will of the mother country.

Moreover, although approving noises were made over the usefulness of Imperial Conferences, only one conference in the 1930s was fully attended – that held in 1937. For much of this decade, as in the 1920s, British governments continued to ignore the opinions of the dominions on foreign policy when they thought it suited their interests.

In the 1930s, however, the long-drawn-out campaign to introduce some measure of imperial commercial preference achieved success. Three decades previously, "Pushful Joe" Chamberlain (Colonial Secretary from 1895 to 1903) had pinned his vibrantly expressed hopes for greater imperial unity to a campaign for tariff reform. Even in the buoyant heyday of late Victorian imperialism, Joe Chamberlain had calculated that it was far safer to appeal to men's pockets than to their hearts.

Nevertheless, it needed the Great Depression, which began in 1929 with the Wall Street Crash, and the subsequent shrinking of world markets, to galvanize the British government into actually starting the scheme.

Lord Beaverbrook's energetically prosecuted Empire Crusade prodded the British cabinet along. From 1930 Beaverbrook clamoured for Empire Free Trade. There were two major drawbacks in this: the dominions still wanted to protect their growing industries; and electoral disaster was certain to befall any British government that allowed food prices to rise because of higher tariffs on non-imperial imports.

The result was a compromise, hammered out at a special Imperial Economic Conference at Ottawa in 1932. As far as compromises go, it was worthy enough. Twelve bilateral fiscal agreements were produced, involving Britain, the dominions, India and some colonial territories.

In addition to the bonds provided by the monarchy, the Imperial Conferences and the Ottawa agreements, there was a certain administrative coherence about the Empire – at least on paper. Three members of the British cabinet were responsible to Parliament for the good governance of the Commonwealth and Empire: the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Secretary of State for India and, from 1925, the Secretary of State for the Dominions.

This was a far cry from the days when Lord Palmerston, on forming an administration, had been unable to persuade any

The British Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin (front row centre), sits flanked by delegates to the vital Imperial Conference of 1926, which defined the dominions as "autonomous communities within the British Empire," linked only symbolically by the British Crown.

of his colleagues to accept the Colonial Office, and had eventually taken it on himself, stamping upstairs to look up "the damned places" on the map.

Beneath the three Secretaries of State were the permanent officials in Whitehall, and then, spreading out over a quarter of the globe, the administrative services which backed up and exercised imperial power. The dominions recruited and appointed their own civil services, but the British Crown still continued to appoint their Governors-General.

Apart from the histrionic constitutional clash between Lord Byng and the Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, in 1926, over King's right to ask for a dissolution of parliament and call an election, the dominions generally found British Governors-General acceptable enough. Indeed, though Britain made it clear from the early 1920s that dominions could put forward their own citizens for the post, Governors-General from the mother country remained much in demand throughout the inter-war period – they had the great political advantage of being imported and supposedly impartial.

The Indian Empire was ruled by the Viceroy and his Lieutenant-Governors, shored up by the most prestigious civil service of them all – the Indian Civil Service. For 60 years after the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the I.C.S. creamed off the ablest graduates of Oxford and Cambridge and dispatched them, fortified by grand prospects and high salaries, to the contrasting squalor and magnificence of the teeming sub-continent.

But by the 1920s, the Colonial Service, for so long the poor relation of the I.C.S., was at last coming into its own. The shadows cast in India by the 1919 Amritsar massacre and by Gandhi's mobilization of the Indian masses made a lifetime's career in the I.C.S. less attractive than hitherto, and this impression was heightened by the steady "Indianization" of the administrative services in the 1930s. In contrast, the African Empire looked permanent and relatively promising, and the quality of recruits into the Colonial Service benefited as a result.

The civil servants of the Empire were bound together by a broad sense of purpose and (perhaps more important) by the old school tie. Salaries might differ widely (from £8,250 for the Governor of Nigeria in 1922 to £200 for a cadet in, say, Kenya), but the vast bulk of administrators had been to similar, if not the same, public schools and many had passed through the ancient universities.

King George VI and Queen Elizabeth prepare for lifeboat drill during their sea voyage to Canada in 1939. King George was the first reigning monarch to visit the dominions.

Lord Lugard of Nigeria was in no doubt as to the quality of these administrators, claiming in 1922 that the public schools "have produced an English gentleman with an almost passionate conception of fair play, of protecting the weak and of 'playing the game.'"

Towards the end of a reasonably successful career in the Empire's service, the average administrator could expect a suitable decoration. At the top, the Governors-General and Governors became Commanders of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George (C.M.G.), or Knights Commander of the same order (K.C.M.G.) or even (better still) Knights Grand Cross of the order (G.C.M.G.). These initials were waggishly misinterpreted to make C.M.G. stand for "Call Me God," K.C.M.G. for "Kindly Call Me God," and G.C.M.G. for "God Calls Me God." Lesser mortals had to remain content with lower-ranking medals like the Star of India or the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.)

The Collar

MEDALS OF EMPIRE

Medals, decorations, orders and titles were the official rewards for Empire service. Such service, whether rendered by a proconsul or an irrigation inspector, was deemed worthy of recognition. The more exalted might expect to become Knights or Dames of the British Empire or even Knights Commander of the Indian Empire. To their less illustrious colleagues went humbler "gongs" such as Order or Member of the British Empire.

Above are decorations of the Order of the Indian Empire, founded in 1877 to commemorate Queen Victoria's proclamation as Empress of India. Its collar is appropriately composed of elephants, peacocks and Indian roses.

The Order of the Star of India (left), founded in 1861, was extended in 1866 to include Knights Grand Commander, Knights Commander and Companions. The Viceroy was Grand Master of both Indian Orders.

Decorations of the Order of St. Michael and St. George were the standard rewards for service overseas. Wags said that K.C.M.G. meant "Kindly Call Me God."

Founded by George V in 1917, the Order of the British Empire usually went to the less illustrious servants of Empire. Men and women were awarded different medals.

III. Forging the Family Bonds

In academic circles the most obvious, indeed blatant, attempt to consolidate imperial unity came with the founding of 60 Rhodes Scholarships at Oxford. According to Boer propaganda, Cecil Rhodes, the great diamond magnate of Kimberley, was a "rich jingo lunatic bastard." Wrongheaded he may have been and rich he certainly was; but his intention was always to achieve unity, not conquest, preferably under the British flag, and his grand visions were amply reflected in his scheme for scholars.

In a codicil to his will, Rhodes allocated £50,000 annually from the income yielded by his £6,000,000 fortune to enable students from Australia, South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, Newfoundland, Jamaica and Bermuda to study at Oxford. The scholars' qualifications, Rhodes stipulated, had to include all-round fitness as well as academic distinction. "The British Empire," he wrote, "needs men of a special breed, and it is these I have in mind."

Indicating that he was an internationalist as well as an imperialist, Rhodes included German and American students – fellow Anglo-Saxons, as he thought – in his scheme. It was a benefice which still plays a valuable unifying role today, though the Empire it was to serve has disappeared and the qualities of leadership Rhodes wished to encourage in his scholars have become discredited in an age of egalitarianism.

A far less sophisticated, but more universal, appeal to imperial brotherhood came from the Scouting movement. Taking its inspiration from Baden-Powell, the well-publicized defender of Mafeking during the Boer War, Scouting boys and girls paid solemn lip service to God, King, Country and Empire, and apparently saw no contradiction between ideals of universal fraternity and a world order which largely rested on the assumption that between rulers and ruled there was a large gulf fixed.

Less formally than in the Scouting movement, there were countless reminders of the imperial legacy, most of them fairly casual and unpretentious, woven into the fabric of everyday life. A boy growing up between the wars might find the Empire brought home to him more forcibly by cigarette cards or comic-strip adventures than by history and geography lessons.

For readers of the *Champion* and the *Hotspur*, Canada meant not so much Mackenzie King as Fireworks Flynn, the Wizard Sports Master of Caribou College, while it was only natural that a boarding-school in a popular series should have a house reserved for colonials ("Conk House") and number among its pupils Chaka the Zulu Boy.

If he wanted something more substantial to read, the schoolboy could always try the latest John Buchan adventure novel or a best-seller such as Major Yeats-Brown's *Bengal Lancer*. As a cricket enthusiast he was likely to be more aware of Australia than of most countries closer home (although, for a time, thanks to the body-line controversy, it looked as though the Test Matches were in danger of becoming a divisive rather than a unifying force); and when he went to the cinema, it might be to see *Sanders of the River*, or Spencer Tracy and Cedric Hardwicke as Stanley and Livingstone, or Ronald Colman in *Clive of India* (which was also one of the first plays to be staged by pre-war B.B.C. television).

In the 1930s, Hollywood's faith in the British Raj was apparently unimpaired, with Cary Grant starring in *Gunga Din*, Gary Cooper re-enacting *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, Sabu and C. Aubrey Smith doing their loyal best for the Queen-Empress.

The general populace was also involved in modest and infrequent rituals designed to emphasize the existence and spirit of Empire. Schoolboys celebrated Empire Day, on the anniversary of Queen Victoria's birthday, with pageants, flag-waving and the singing of *Land of Hope and Glory*. For their elders there was the great imperial jamboree at the 1924 Wembley Exhibition in north London. There, on a site some 220 acres in extent, the exhibition complex was constructed: concrete and steel pavilions to house the exhibit of dominions and colonies; roadways with imperial names bestowed by Rudyard Kipling, such as Drake's Way, Commonwealth Way, Anson's Way; and a great stadium, later acquired by the English Football Association.

At a cost of £11,000,000, of which £10,000,000 had been contributed by commercial enterprise and the rest by the governments of Britain and the Commonwealth, it was one of the most lavish imperial spectacles ever staged.

George V speaks to the peoples of the Empire from Sandringham on Christmas Day, 1934.

When the King opened it on St. George's Day, April 23, 1924, it had been two years in the building.

"This great achievement," His Majesty declared, "reveals to us the whole Empire in little, containing within its grounds a vivid model of the architecture, art, and industry of all the races which come under the British flag. We believe that this Exhibition will bring the peoples of the Empire to a better knowledge of how to meet their reciprocal wants and aspirations; and we hope further that the success of the Exhibition may bring lasting benefits not to the Empire only, but to mankind in General."

A hundred thousand people were actually present – most of them by special invitation. The scientific and technical innovations demonstrated at Wembley offered encouragement to those who hoped, like the ex-pro-consul, Lord Milner, that the Exhibition would help to provide a "powerful bulwark" against imperial decay. The most promising of these "new links of Empire" was the radio. In 1922 six manufacturers of radio equipment had contributed £100,000 to found the British Broadcasting Company, and "the wonderful wireless" had entered half a million homes by the end

The 1924 Empire Exhibition, advertised by posters like the one above, received an additional burst of publicity during the visit of King George V and Queen Mary, seen here (above right) entering the Hong Kong section with the King and Queen of Rumania.

of the B.B.C.'s first year in operation.

"Here indeed," said King George on being presented with a receiver specially built for him by the B.B.C.'s Chief Engineer, Captain P.P.Eckersley, "is a machine that can work the miracle of communication between me and my people in far-off places."

Clearly, he accepted the scientific effectiveness of the contrivance without question. The Archbishop of Canterbury, on the other hand, found it most mysterious and asked if one had to leave the windows open "to let the waves in"; but he was pleased with the possibility – "when the wireless is out of its infancy" – of a church service being "broadcasted."

At the opening of the Wembley Exhibition the British Broadcasting Company's microphone was suspended a few inches to the right of the King's head and through it his voice was carried by landline to the Marconi transmitting station at Chelmsford. "Never before," said a *Daily Mail* leader with proper awe, "has a King's voice been heard by his subjects both in his presence and in their own homes as well – to the tune of perhaps a million homes. Such a miracle can do nothing but cement the bonds of Empire."

A further bond of Empire was a gramophone record of the King's broadcast. The Gramophone Company, trade-named His Master's Voice, recorded it by their new "electrical" method and that same night, hundreds of pressings of it were rushed by special messenger to Croydon to be flown by the new-fangled aeroplanes to every corner of the Empire.

After the Exhibition, the wonderful wireless continued to make great strides as a link of Empire. On Armistice Day, 1927, the B.B.C.'s Chief Announcer, Stuart Hibberd, announced the beginning of the relay of the British Legion Rally at the Albert Hall in a new form: "This is the British Broadcasting Corporation calling the British Isles, the British Empire, the United States of America and the Continent of Europe from London, England, through Daventry 5XX and Chelmsford 5SW."

Here, truly, was a means of drawing the Empire closer together, and, as the popular *Daily Mirror* said, "brought the mother country's voice into the Australian shearing shed, the Indian plantation and the Canadian ranch-house alike."

To be sure, only the United States had at this time the apparatus to relay the broadcast on its own network; but it was only a matter of time before "people in far-off places," as the King had called them, were able to do the same, and thus were divided only geographically from London. "In spirit," the *Morning Post* confidently pointed out, "the peoples of the Empire have never been divided. But now the miracle of wireless has brought us all into each other's homes."

The B.B.C.'s regular Empire broadcasts began in 1932 with special programmes designed, as their Director-General, Sir John Reith, put it, "to keep unshaken the faith the British nation has in its Empire." Among these programmes was the Christmas Day message broadcast by the King from that year on. It was probably the most effective imperial ritual introduced between the wars.

Yet another promising new link was provided by the growth of air travel. When, soon after Alcock and Brown's crossing of the Atlantic in June, 1919, both India and Australia were linked with Britain by aerial flight, *The Times* boomed: "Who shall calculate the effects of the dwindling distance between the far separated parts of the Empire which is the certain result of air traffic?" The Press in general regarded dwindling distance as a unifying force directly concerning the man in the street.

Feature after feature appeared in the newspapers and magazines, illustrated with diagrams, symbols and miniature maps, giving the impression that in a month or so anyone would be able to make a weekend visit to relatives in Singapore, fly in special observation cars over the Australian outback, have lunch in Malta and dinner on Table Mountain, view the Taj Mahal from above, and cross the entire dominion of Canada in less time than it took to get from London to Edinburgh and back by train.

Nothing could suppress public interest in the new marvel of flight. There was a huge potential of vicarious travellers attracted by its novelty and possibilities – as could be seen any weekend in the early 1920s at the new London Terminal Aerodrome at Croydon, where sightseers watched the passenger planes arrive and take off and a steady queue of rash customers waited to risk the five-shilling, ten-minute trips over the aerodrome in two-seater planes.

The sightseers noted the fanciful signposts that had been erected: Karachi, 4,000 miles; Cairo, 2,000 miles; Sydney, 11,000 miles; Johannesburg, 6,000 miles; and so on. These Empire outposts were not yet joined by regular aeronautical links with England; but this seemed a certain part of the future.

In 1924 the first British national airline, Imperial Airways, was formed and five years later was operating regular services to Egypt, India, Sydney, Singapore, Palestine, Burma, Malaya and Central Africa.

The airline's success was impressive. In its first year of operation it carried 12,000 passengers and 250,000 letters over an aggregate of 853,042 miles; by the end of the decade the annual number of passengers had grown to 58,000 and the number of letters to 11 million, while the mileage had leapt to 2½ million.

Aircraft designers had not been slow to enter into competition with their rival, the ocean-going passenger liner. The aircraft could hardly promise space, but they played heavily on comfort. One of the most famous of them, the de Havilland *Hercules*, had an armchair and table for each of the 16 passengers.

These fortunate people could fly all the way to India (with essential fuel stops at Marseilles, Pisa, Naples, Malta, Khoms, Benghazi, Sollum, Aboukir, Ziza, Baghdad, Basra, Bushire and Karachi) with photographs of their approving sovereign and his queen on the tastefully covered walls of the cabin and on the floor a carpet monogrammed IA. It was as much like the interior of a private cabin aboard a luxury liner and as little like anything else as possible.

No one was to be startled with a reminder that the plane was several thousand feet above the earth and subject to the force of gravity. Nor was anyone to be reminded either (though this was not the designer's business) that the route to India passed through such outlandish places as Iraq and Baluchistan, where hostile tribesmen might be encountered on landing.

Brochures were silent on such matters – and instead glamorized the "beauty of the territory peopled with strange nomadic races that fringe our Empire."

"BE PREPARED"

One of the firmest and most enduring links of Empire was the Boy Scout movement. Founded in 1908 by Robert Baden-Powell, who had thrilled the Empire a generation before as the heroic defender of Mafeking against the Boers, the movement's motto was that of the South African Constabulary: "Be Prepared." Baden-Powell, seen here with admirers at the Imperial Scout Jamboree, held in London in 1924, deliberately appealed to the adventurousness and idealism of young people. The response was world-wide: when Baden-Powell died in 1941 there were some $3\frac{1}{2}$ million scouts throughout the world.

The Great Outdoors

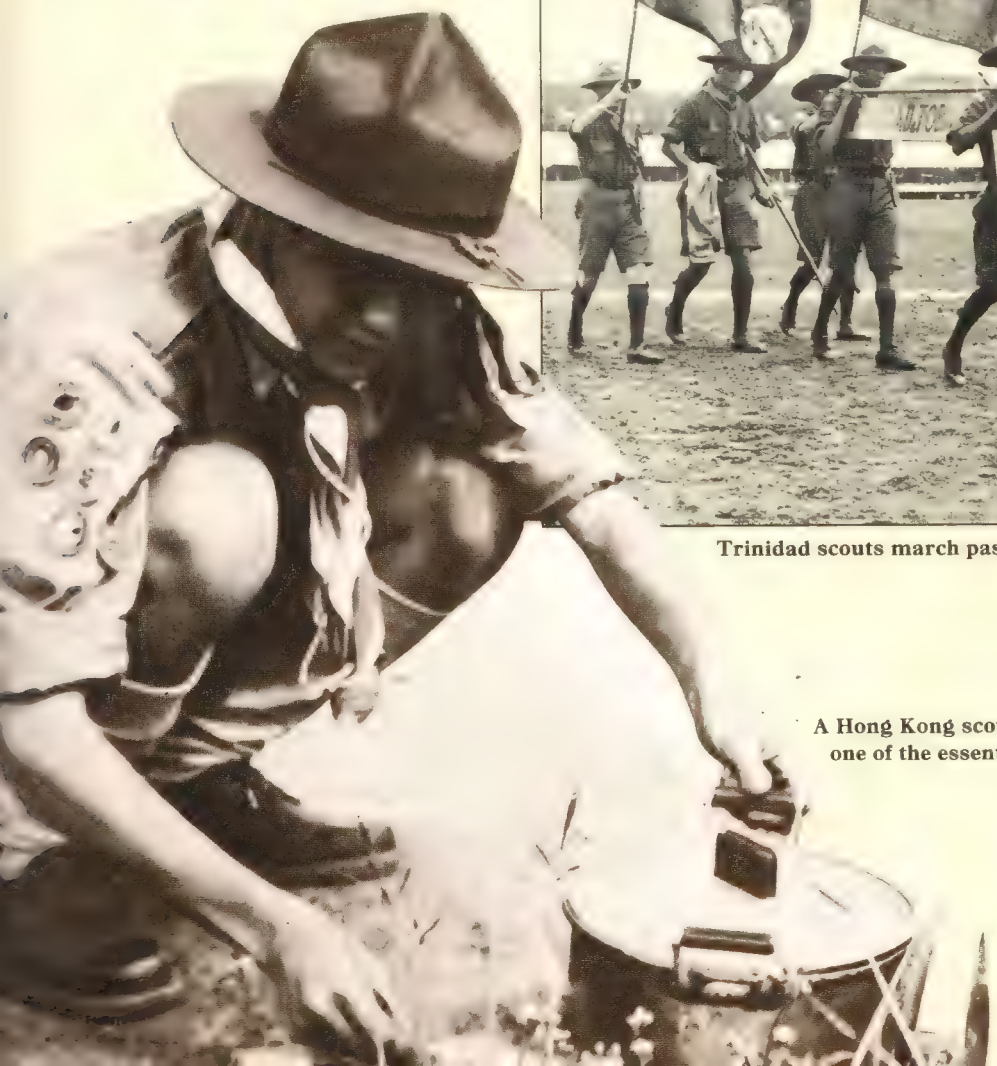
Shortly before publishing his book, *Scouting for Boys*, in 1908, Baden-Powell had held an experimental camp on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, Dorset. It was here, as the Union Jack of Mafeking floated overhead, that he had tested out the value of the outdoor life on boys.

Basing his theories on his own experience of active school holidays and his subsequent soldiering life in India and South Africa, Baden-Powell taught the boys how to enjoy as well as survive life in the open air. Mundane but essential tasks such as cooking were combined with exciting projects like cave exploration, canoeing and gliding.

New branches were formed as the movement's popularity grew. In 1916 Cub packs, based on Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Books*, were launched for boys under 11. Sea Scouts were introduced in 1910 and Air Scouts in 1939. Even the handicapped boys had their own troops as early as 1925 so that they could join the world-wide brotherhood that filled young lungs with fresh air.

A group of scouts from British Guiana stand among the guy-ropes of their 1929 summer camp. Their broad-brimmed hats were a badge of scouting from Melbourne to Manchester.

Trinidad scouts march past "B.P." at a 1929 Jamboree.



A Hong Kong scout finds that cooking is one of the essential chores of camp life.

A party of Indian Scouts perches nonchalantly on a perilous-looking bridge. Their topees adorn two of the posts.

True to the Canadian tradition, a mountie-scout sits astride his horse at Springford, Ontario. Few Scout troops included horses.

This patrol of Australian Scouts shows an evident delight in the rigours of cave camping.

Brotherhood of the World

Hailed as a hero of the British Empire, Robert Baden-Powell established a unique movement which transcended national as well as racial and religious boundaries. At meetings or in camp, Scout Law was the only code of behaviour and Scouts were expected to practise tolerance and good-fellowship.

The blend of idealism, self-reliance and adventurousness preached by "B.P.," as he was known, produced an eager response from youngsters outside the Empire as well as from those within it. In 1920 Scouts from 26 nations attended an international jamboree held in London and a permanent International Scout Bureau was set up. A second international jamboree held in Copenhagen only four years later drew Scouts from 33 nations. When Baden-Powell died in 1941, the movement he had led and inspired for over 30 years, was already flourishing throughout the world. Today 12½ million youngsters subscribe to his ideal. Its influence has remained with many all their lives. Former U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General Keith Johnson, for example, always kept a *Boy Scout Handbook* in his office together with his Bible.

Gold Coast Cubs learn the art of camp cooking.

Ugandan Scouts stand to attention as the Union Jack flutters up over their camp in 1951.

Rover Scouts from South Africa and Southern Rhodesia proudly display their national emblems at one of the world gatherings.

Sea Scouts gather under the looming rock of Gibraltar.

A patrol of Nigerian Scouts pose in traditional headgear.

A young Kenyan, Peter Mwangi, reads the certificate declaring him a Queen's Scout.

IV. The Decline of British Influence

Another grandiose and ambitious project of imperial imaginations was the airship or dirigible. When the aeroplane was still in its infancy, the airship, with its larger capacity and greater comfort, seemed to have a good chance of becoming the air transport of the future. The Zeppelin Company in Germany had been flying dirigibles since 1912 and in July, 1919, the British *R-34* had made a two-way crossing of the Atlantic.

Then, at the Imperial Conference of 1923, Sir Samuel Hoare set in motion a government plan to sponsor two gigantic airships for trans-oceanic service to India, Australia, Africa and Canada. These were to be called the *R-100* and the *R-101*, and they were supposed to be in service by the end of 1926, though neither was ready on time. In August, 1930, the *R-100* flew to Montreal and back, but special attention was reserved for the *R-101*. The Secretary of State for Air, Lord Thomson, was to be a passenger on her maiden voyage to Delhi via Egypt, on October 4.

"As I set out on this journey," he said in his departing speech before the great airship was released from her mooring mast at Cardington, "I am reminded of the great hopes that have been pinned on this magnificent ship of the air as a link with the farthest corners of that everlasting entity, the British Empire. Already the aeroplane has overtaken the dirigible in speed and has provided us with the miracle of air contact with our distant brothers; but here is a form of conveyance far more satisfactory in respect to comfort, capacity, and promise. This is the Empire link of the future, and I set out now to prove that the air and the far corners of the earth are ours to command." A band then played *Land of Hope and Glory* and the National Anthem and the airship was released into the gathering dusk of the autumn evening.

At two o'clock the following morning the *R-101* crashed in flames on a hillside near Beauvais in northern France. All but six of the 52 men on board were killed, including Lord Thomson. British interest in the dirigible waned, and the aeroplane forged ahead.

In 1927 Alan Cobham had made a solo flight to and from Australia, and in 1930 Amy Johnson, the queen of the skies, reached Darwin via Vienna, Baghdad and Karachi. The world was demonstrably becoming smaller.

Whether good will would inevitably flow from these easier opportunities for contact and from the new communications media of radio, cinema and gramophone, had yet to be seen. Optimists hoped that the traditional bonds of Empire, such as a common language and culture, similar political and judicial institutions, and a shared history, would be strengthened. But dominion and Indian nationalism and the drive towards imperial decentralization were by now too powerful to be halted.

To put back the clock would take more than the pious platitudes of royal and political speech-making, more than an Exhibition in an unfashionable north London suburb, more even than the voice of Stuart Hibberd borne on radio waves to the four corners of the globe. The foundations of the Empire were shifting well before that fateful day on September 3, 1939, when the British government declared war on Nazi Germany.

As early as the 1920s, enthusiasm for Empire was already on the wane. The cheers, though they persisted, were growing restrained and the heckling had become a good deal more audible. The deeper reasons for this change lay, not within the Empire itself, but in the new conditions that occurred after the upheaval of the First World War.

The whole European order had been severely shaken by the war, while at home the hereditary ruling class no longer had quite the same sublime faith in itself, and the rise of Labour at the expense of the Liberals had established a new play of domestic political forces.

Not that the two inter-war minority Labour governments were able to contribute much to decolonization. Anxious to appear politically respectable, Ramsay MacDonald's cabinet did not open the floodgates to Indian nationalism. Like Winston Churchill in 1940, MacDonald had not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the dissolution of the British Empire! (When King George V sent for MacDonald in 1924 to ask him to form his first government, there were some royal qualms. But an hour's talk with the Labour leader set the King's

Atlantic Trail-Blazers

In June, 1919, Captain John Alcock and Lieutenant A.W.Brown, both former wartime pilots and ex-P.O.W.s, and both from Manchester, became the first men to fly direct across the Atlantic, opening an era of international air travel that promised to weld the scattered imperial units together in a way never before possible. Taking off from Newfoundland at 5.28 p.m. on June 14, they headed towards Galway, 1,880 miles away.

They were dogged for most of the way by foul weather. "We have had a terrible journey," Alcock said later. "For four hours the machine was covered in a sheet of ice carried by frozen sleet. At another time the fog was so dense that my speed indicator did not work, and for a few seconds it was very alarming."

A further hazard for the airmen was the failure of their radio transmitter. The world heard nothing from them during their flight and they were unable to receive radio messages from the ground. Without navigational instructions, the pair had to rely upon occasional glimpses of the moon and stars for guidance.

For the plane itself, a Vickers Vimy-Rolls, Alcock had nothing but praise. But on landing in Galway 16 hours and 12 minutes after take-off, Alcock found that he had mistaken bogland for firm, flat ground and as its wheels ploughed into the soft earth, the aircraft tilted on to its nose and its two propellers churned into the clinging mud.

Soldiers and wireless operators from the nearby Marconi radio station, many of them still in pyjamas, rushed out to rescue the stranded airmen.

Their triumph won them a joint *Daily Mail* award of £10,000, a knighthood each and the fervent acclaim of King and Empire. "Bravo, Lancashire!" wired one jubilant admirer. "Where Manchester has flown today let the world try to follow tomorrow."

John Alcock (left) and A. W. Brown relax in front of their epic-making aircraft. Brown declared that he had "had enough of flying for a bit." But Alcock went on – and died in a flying accident the following year.

mind at rest. "He impressed me very much," the King noted in his diary. "He wishes to do the right thing. Today 23 years ago dear grandmama died. I wonder what she would have thought of a Labour Government!") Nor was the trade union wing of the Labour party, which tended to equate imperial possession with a reasonable domestic prosperity, overwhelmingly committed to the cause of colonial freedom.

Nevertheless, in theory the Labour Party was an anti-imperialist movement. On top of this, specifically imperial developments were signposting the path away from the old-style Empire. The war had underlined the difference between the dominions and the colonies, and subsequent events were making it plain that for practical purposes dominion status now meant independence. Even traditionalists were now obliged to refer to the British Empire and Commonwealth, an awkward double-barrelled name which emphasized the duality of the imperial inheritance.

As a rallying-cry, "Commonwealth" lacked the fire and resonance of Empire. It carried overtones of sober co-operation rather than proud self-assertion: few writers felt impelled to celebrate the "Deeds that Won the Commonwealth," and no audience would ever have been inspired to see a show at the Commonwealth, Leicester Square.

In what remained of Empire proper, neither India nor the colonies gave imperialists much cause for jubilation. Black Africa, which had seemed to promise so much in the days of Joseph Chamberlain, was on the whole proving a disappointing investment. In India, the life was beginning to ebb from the Raj: diehards might fulminate against Gandhi, but he increasingly held the initiative and the headlines.

Only in the Middle East could Britain be said to be making decisive advances and here, too, there were insurmountable troubles, and the spread of British influence in the region came too late to find unqualified imperial expression. Lawrence of Arabia was not only the last of the great story-book heroes of British expansion but the most ambiguous, and his popular reputation was that of adventurer rather than of empire-builder.

THE NEW PIONEERS

The great imperial trail-blazers between the wars were the aviators. They opened up the skies just as the earlier pioneers had explored the outback and penetrated the jungles of Africa. The public thrilled to each new exploit, but its loudest ovations were reserved for a slim young typist from Hull – Amy Johnson.

Amy hit the headlines in 1930 as the first woman to fly solo to Australia – and for the next decade her name was rarely out of the papers. But in 1941 the wreckage of her plane was found; and two years later "Wonderful Amy" was officially presumed dead.

Amy Johnson stands happily by her plane at Dum-Dum Airport, Calcutta, in June, 1930, after a record-breaking flight from London.

Britain rejoiced in 1932 when its young heroine, Amy Johnson (above), married another air pioneer, Jim Mollison (right). But six years later they were divorced.

Francis Chichester sits at the controls of his biplane (above) and smiles triumphantly (right) after a successful flight. He was an enthusiastic flyer and a warm admirer of Amy Johnson, but it was not until the 1960s, as a lone round-the-world sailor, that he equalled her fame.

The R-101 Disaster

For more than a decade after the First World War it was believed that airships, or dirigibles, could still be effective alternatives to the aeroplane and in 1929 Britain launched the airship *R-101* as part of an ambitious scheme to bind the Empire closer.

Built with a framework of steel girders and powered by five diesel engines, the airship lifted off its mooring mast for a voyage to India on October 4, 1930. But it flew into a storm over northern France, crashed into a hillside near Beauvais and immediately burst into flames. Among the 46 killed were the Secretary of State for Air, Lord Thomson and Air Vice-Marshal Sir Sefton Branckner.

"The fire," a survivor later recalled, "was awful – awful. . . . It was all over in a minute." Over, too, was the era of the airship. Britain scrapped her remaining airship, the *R-100*, relying now upon the aeroplane to provide imperial air links.

The *R-101*, designed as a link between Britain and the Empire, floats at her mooring mast at Cardington, Bedfordshire.

A crumpled framework of girders is all that remains of the ill-fated *R-101* airship after its crash in 1930. "It looked," said an eyewitness, "like the half-built roof of a railway station."

The great airship, *R-101*, hovers over St. Paul's Cathedral in 1930, an uncanny reminder to Londoners of those wartime days when German Zeppelins dropped their bombs on the capital.

V. The Final Curtain

Given the decline of imperial sentiment, it is scarcely surprising that no new seers of Empire arose, and that those who remained began to look isolated and even cranky. Lionel Curtis, one of the leaders of the Round Table group, was at work on a voluminous declaration of faith in the imperial mission, *Civitas Dei*: it caused barely a ripple, whereas 50 years before it might have made him famous.

In politics, the old attitudes still found a notable exponent in Churchill, but it was his attitude to the Empire as much as anything which kept him out of office. Unyielding imperialists now constituted a faction on the right, rather than the main body of Conservative opinion; nor were the newspaper barons, Beaverbrook and Rothermere, able in the end to get anywhere against Prime Minister Baldwin with their crusade for "Empire Free Trade."

The critics of Empire were pressing home the attack as never before. The 1920s were the decade which invented debunking – and, by implication, one of the chief targets of a book like Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* was the imperial ethos. These years were also marked by a deep revulsion against war and a surge of League-of-Nations idealism.

In the 1930s the political assault intensified, with Kingsley Martin at the helm of the left-wing *New Statesman*, the Socialist Harold Laski lecturing at the London School of Economics, Victor Gollancz running the Left Book Club – and apologists for the Empire, though they might justifiably complain of anti-imperialists who turned a blind eye to Stalin, could find no one of comparable ability to publicize their cause.

Even among those who went out to govern the Empire there were seditious spirits. George Orwell, the essayist and novelist, who served briefly in the Burma police, wrote in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: "All over India there are Englishmen who secretly loathe the system of which they are part; and just occasionally, when they are quite certain of being in the right company, their hidden bitterness overflows. I remember a night I spent on the train with a man in the Educational Service, a stranger to myself whose name I never discovered. It was too hot to sleep and we spent the night in talking. Half an hour's cautious questioning decided each of us that the other was 'safe'; and then for hours, while the train jolted slowly through the pitch-black night, sitting up in our bunks with bottles of beer handy, we damned the British Empire – damned it from the inside, intelligently and intimately. It did us both good. But we had been speaking forbidden things, and in the haggard morning light, when the train crawled into Mandalay, we parted as guiltily as any adulterous couple."

All this no doubt reflected the outlook of an intellectual minority, but it was a sizeable one and its attitudes were being spread further afield by publishers and the mass media. The cartoons of David Low, for example, had an enormous impact, especially the ones featuring Colonel Blimp. Imperialism, as personified by the Colonel, was a grotesque joke. And, indeed, even those who took a kinder view of the Empire often smiled where once they might have saluted.

In a more practical way the ordinary citizens of Britain voted against the Empire with their feet – or rather with their steamship tickets. In 1913, 304,000 emigrants had left the country, of which 78 per cent made for the dominions. The Empire Settlement Act of 1922 tried to encourage this trend and the Treasury promised up to £3,000,000 to finance assisted passages. But the massive exodus of migrants never took place. Between 1922 and 1930 the average outflow was less than half the total for 1913, and between 1930 and 1934 there was actually a net *inflow* between Britain and the Empire-Commonwealth.

Clearly, the mass of ordinary people in the inter-war years were not galvanized into frantic, or even enthusiastic, patriotic activity by the imperial message, whereas their fathers might at least have sung *Soldiers of the Queen* with gusto. No doubt it was a comfort to feel that in the moment of danger the Empire-Commonwealth would stand by Britain, as indeed it did in 1940, with the exception of the Irish Free State.

No doubt, also, many accepted unquestioningly the essential brotherhood of all the peoples of the Empire, which was emphasized each Christmas Day by George V and his successors. No doubt the adjective "imperial," attached to so many British institutions, gave a sense of grandeur. But at root, the cause of Empire seems to have been much less important for the man in the street than the prospects for social reform or economic regeneration, or the growing need to combat the menacing advance of Fascism.

Except during the Second World War, few working men went overseas to visit the colonies, or indeed had seen many black faces at home; those who settled in the dominions soon became New Zealanders or Australians in outlook. The Empire the British saw in the films was as remote as anything in the world of science fiction, and for the most part these heroes of Empire spoke with an American accent. Men read the *Daily Express* for its racing tips rather than because it was crusading for Empire Free Trade. The Empire never, as Rhodes thought it would, became a "bread and butter" question for ordinary people.

In the end, therefore, the hoped-for new spirit of Empire proved incredibly faint. When the colonies demanded independence, few in Britain – and those almost entirely from an older generation and with personal or family ties with the Empire – thought to resist.

Perhaps the British were imbued with a liberal and tolerant attitude towards Empire, though this is a charitable assessment. More compelling is the argument that in the inter-war period, as in the years after 1945, the British people got their priorities right, and on the whole treated the Empire as a comforting and occasionally spectacular backdrop to the more vital activities being played out at home or in the European theatre.

Of course, the imperial show still went on and there were still those ardent disciples of Joseph Chamberlain who insisted that the show *must* go on if Britain's great-power status was not simply to crumble away. But, although new actors trod the well-worn boards and different managements tried to dazzle the the public with technical innovations, the final curtain was soon to fall. It was, ironically, only then that the actors, impresarios and financial backers of Empire realized that they had been catering for an almost empty auditorium.

H.M.S. Victory